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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: JOURNALIST OF UNITED NATIONS-SPONSORED RADIO STATION KILLED
IN ESTERN DRC

REF: A) 06 Kinshasa 1933 (and previou), B) Kinshasa 314, C)
Kinshasa 451, D) Kinshasa 582

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: Serge Maheshe, a journalist working for UN-funded Radio Okapi, was killed June 13 by two unidentified armed men in Bukavu, South Kivu province. It is not yet sure that the assassination is linked to Maheshe's work as a journalist. He had been outspoken about exactions inflicted on the population by armed militias. This murder follows the assassination attempt against Radio Okapi reporter Jean Ngandu in May 2005. The trial of the accused killers of independent journalist Bapuwa Mwamba, fatally wounded in mid-2006, got under way June 1. End Summary.

Journalist Killed in Apparent Targeted Violence

¶2. (U) Serge Maheshe, a Radio Okapi sub-editor, was killed as he was getting into a MONUC vehicle, after attending in Bukavu (South Kivu) a European Union and civil society meeting on security for human rights activists. Night had fallen. According to a local human rights defender, the perpetrators of this crime, clad in civilian clothing, apparently targeted the journalist. Weeks before the murder, Maheshe covered the slaughter of villagers, apparently by FDLR-affiliated Rasta militia, in Kanyola, South Kivu province. The Radio Okapi journalist had spoken about the threat of militia violence in the region to the population and to members of human rights NGOs.

Radio Okapi and the DRC Press Minister React to the Murder

¶3. (SBU) Radio Okapi editorial director Yves Renard told PAO that Serge Maheshe had received threats earlier, adding this is not very unusual for journalists of that radio. Renard stated that Radio Okapi is not yet convinced of a direct link between the threats and the shooting, but was doing all it could to find out. Toussaint Tshilombo Send, the DRC Press, Information and National

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Communication Minister led a minute of silence at the opening of the headquarters of the new National Association of DRC Newspapers Editors (ANECO) June 14, attended by PAO. He promised the government will do all it can to bring the perpetrators to justice. He said he thought Serge Maheshe could have been killed because of something he may have been preparing to report.

¶4. (U) This is not the first instance of armed violence against a Radio Okapi journalist. On May 28, 2005, three soldiers ambushed and shot five times at reporter Jean Ngandu in Lubumbashi, Katanga province. The aggressors reportedly said they had been sent because

of his "excessive talkativeness." Ngandu escaped the assassination attempt unscathed. Thus far, no serious investigation has been conducted into this murder attempt.

Bapuwa Mwamba Assassination Trial Begins

15. (U) A Kinshasa military tribunal June 1 held the first hearing in the trial for the murder of Bapuwa Mwamba, an independent print journalist fatally wounded in his home by three armed men, including an accused army deserter, during the night of July 8, 2006 (ref A). The presumed assassins and another unapprehended suspect are facing charges of murder, illegal possession of weapons, criminal conspiracy and armed robbery.

16. (SBU) Comment: Journalists continue to be vulnerable to violence, despite the landmark conviction in the death of journalist Franck Ngyke Kangundu and his wife Helene Paka in April of this year (ref C). The murder of Serge Maheshe will renew calls for more thorough investigations and convincing prosecutions. The MONUC connection to Radio Okapi should ensure that that will be the case, at least for the Maheshe investigation. Pending that investigation, the murder of Maheshe will also raise tensions in the already-tense Kivus, whether or not that was the intent of this act.

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